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We are Witnesses

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We are Witnesses

Platform for Action
from the
LWF International Consultation on Women

22-28 October 1995
Geneva, Switzerland

Women in Church & Society
Lutheran World Federation, Geneva, Switzerland

Parallel edition in German/French/Spanish:
**Wir sind Zeuginnen/Nous sommes des témoins/
Somos testigos**

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FOREWORD

"Dear Sisters and Brothers,

On behalf of the Lutheran World Federation, the staff in Geneva and in the field programs, it is my joy and pleasure to welcome you to this consultation. As staff we have been looking forward to this day and we are happy that you are finally here. My colleagues and I are looking forward to a week marked by an intensive, consultative approach to issues before us and a mutual search for a way forward. In my view, this International Consultation on Women has a special character to it for several reasons.

Firstly, we have for the first time in the history of the LWF's meetings on issues related to the welfare of women sought to invite each member church. Your presence here, from the membership of the Lutheran Communion, is a clear affirmation of the Federation's commitment to building visible expressions of unity. In other words, we have here a small but significant step which attempts to translate in practical ways what we adopted as resolutions and commitments at the seventh and eighth LWF Assemblies in Budapest,1984 and Curitiba, 1990 respectively.

The second reason why this consultation is a special one is closely related to the first. You will recall that in 1989 this consultation was called International Consultation **for** *Women. This time, it is called International Consultation on Women. This prepositional change from for to* **on** *is important. It reflects a shift, a widening of the focus, and the understanding that issues about women are not just for women but are societal issues. They concern both men and women, in other words they concern the whole church, the*

whole community and the whole nation. Because of this understanding we have for the first time invited men as full participants to this meeting.

This is a special occasion for another reason, too. We are twenty months away from the LWF Ninth Assembly to be held in Hong Kong in July 1997. This second international consultation on women will give an opportunity to the women and men from the churches in the regions to identify urgent issues and to find ways on how to include these issues in the Regional Pre-Assemblies and in the next LWF Assembly. This Assembly will also be a moment for thanksgiving to God for a life of togetherness embarked on in Lund, Sweden, in 1947; a moment to recognize with humility and a contrite heart that our life together is a gift, but a very expensive gift because it costs God much more than human words can ever express or the human mind can ever understand, a time to recall that this Lutheran communion was born out of the ashes of two World Wars, God's grace and forgiveness. We shall seek to speak to each other about the weaknesses, fears, prejudices and attitudes, which continue to prevail in our communities and churches and dedicate ourselves for a new community and a future full of hope.

This consultation is held three years before the end of the Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women, and this brings me to the fourth reason why this consultation is significant. I hope indeed that this very important gathering representing member churches of the Lutheran communion will find time and space within its very hectic schedule to make constructive remarks on this matter. Can we confidently say that the decade which started in 1988 is indeed a "Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women" or has it been played out as **the**

***women's decade**? Has the decade found its way into the structures of the churches and influenced the way churches are organized, decisions are made in our home dioceses, synods, congregations and parishes? What about the **constitutions** and other **instrumentalities** that govern the formal life and work of our churches and institutions, which make it possible for both men and women to participate in decision-making in God's mission? Have they been amended to accommodate a ministry of partnership between women and men? I am not talking about cosmetic changes but changes that involve awareness-building and genuine participation.*

What about the whole area of theological education and ordained ministry? Has progress been made in doing theological reflection from an inclusive human point of view rather than from the perspective of patriarchy? In this connection let me register the fact that since the eighth Assembly, a number of member churches have ordained women to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. At the time of writing this statement, I am aware of six women bishops in the LWF constituency: two in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, two in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, one in the Church of Norway, and one in the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church (Germany). It is my sincere hope that many more churches will move in this direction. It is also my hope that such developments will be an opportunity for the church to develop an inclusive theological perspective.

We are meeting at a very important point in the history of the ecumenical movement. The ecumenical scene is marked by inter-confessional dialogue at various levels - national, regional and international. Some of these dialogues have concluded their work and others are still in

progress. They must involve and include men and, on equal basis, women. The participation of women in these dialogues remains a concern for the LWF at every level. We must move forward with able teams consisting of a healthy representation of men and women, otherwise the next vital stage - namely the ***reception*** *of these conclusions - will never go beyond the paper on which they are written.*

Not least, since women constitute the majority of church membership, one would hope that common sense will guide us to draw the only conclusion there is, namely that meaningful ***reception*** *will be impossible unless this part of the body of Christ is involved.*

In view of these few historical landmarks mentioned here, it is clear in my mind that we cannot at this gathering let go neither the opportunity nor the moment to consider seriously and reflect critically on how the member churches consisting of men and women have lived out the Reformation principle of justification by grace alone and how they have translated into action the understanding of the priesthood as a gift to all believers."

(Extracts from the opening address
by the Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko,
LWF General Secretary)

"One may wonder as to why we have a desk for Women in Church and Society in the LWF. As most of you may know, we have had a women's desk in the LWF since 1972. Before the Curitiba Assembly of 1990, the desk was in the Department of Studies. After the restructuring of the Federation, the Women's desk was placed in DMD to

"foster among member churches awareness, study, research and analysis of issues relating to the promotion of equality between women and men and the full participation of women in all aspects of church and community life in member churches worldwide".

This is in line with the message of Curitiba which commits the LWF and its constituency to be a sign of an inclusive communion in the world.

What does the promotion of equality between women and men and full participation of women in church and society entail? What are the issues and challenges that we must face together in order for us to be a sign of an inclusive community?

On the one hand, we must face the challenges that the promotion of justice and awareness of rights for women brings. We must acknowledge quite frankly that most men feel threatened by talks about equality with women. Like most privileged groups, men fear that equality means in practice loss of power, authority, and privileges. Fear and lack of understanding beget resistance, conservatism and even chauvinism. These and our own fear of these reactions are the challenges we must face.

On the other hand, we must also initiate and sustain, in all creativity and good sense, the promotion of the involvement of women in all facets of societal life, especially at the decision-making and leadership level. Promotion of women's involvement does not mean allowing women to participate, as if they needed permission to do so. Rather, it means that women, together, empower themselves to seize every occasion as an opportunity to share the gift of grace entrusted to them and thus "event" the good news of Jesus Christ in all situations.

Why this consultation?

It is a way for us to strategize together and to empower each other to effect change in church and society. In other words, we hold this consultation because you are expected to make a difference. Should there be a difference? Yes, there must be a difference!"

(Extracts from the address to the Consultation
by the Rev. Dr. Péri Rasolondraibe,
director,
LWF Department for Mission and Development)

THE PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

This is a working report. Like the Platform of Action produced by women in the Fourth UN World Conference on Women, this report identifies issues needing attention and then proposes some actions to be taken. Member churches, the LWF Secretariat, funding agencies and individual men and women are asked to play their part to make a difference for the benefit of the whole church. Liaison persons, regional coordinators and staff of the LWF will bring this report for consideration by member churches. Each member church will need to identify where their situation calls for most urgent attention.

During six days of intensive work, the participants in the LWF International Consultation on Women did what they could to "make a differnce". Major presentations were given in the plenary sessions while most of the discussions took place in regional groups. Daily worship was an experience of shared faith which began every new day by lifting Jesus as the model for the desired difference.

The consultation has paved the way for us to become a church based Platform for Action for women. Taking into account both the situation of women in their societies and churches the representatives from the LWF member churches were able to set some priorities by identifying six issues which urgently need programmatic actions. These are named as : Living in Communion, Sitting at the Table as Equals, Ordination of Women, Education and Leadership Training, Economic Justice, Safe Places for Women and Children in Church

and Society. The contents of these issues is closely related to those outlined in the LWF publication *"A Clear Plan of Action"* but the report is more specific and direct in naming where and who must get involved to bring about change.

The report is a major step towards achieving gender equality and is the most comprehensive statement **on women** that has come from an LWF-convened gathering of women and men. The report points to issues of inequality in our communion and in society, the violence on women's lives even in the church, and the yet to be achieved goal of partnership of men and women. To work for the establishment of justice, peace and development means to embark on practical programs that promote these principles.

Hence the report states:

> ***We have shared the realities of life in our churches and countries. We have shared our joy and presence in the Lutheran Communion, but we have also spoken out of our pain and frustration. We have shared our hopes and visions. Will our voices be heard? Will our concerns be taken into serious consideration? Will steps be taken by others to join us in our firm determination to struggle for equality with men in the church and in the LWF? Our struggle is within the church even as we know some have left the church because they see little hope of change.***

The LWF Office for Women in Church and Society presents this document as the report of the International Consultation on Women. Copies are available in four languages: English, French, German and Spanish. Papers

presented at the conference are available in these languages in their original form. A selective number of papers will be published in an issue of LWF STUDIES in English only. This report is released on March 8 to mark the International Women's Day.

Musimbi Kanyoro,
Secretary for Women in Church and Society,
Geneva, 8 March 1996.

INTRODUCTION

The 1995 International Consultation on Women takes place as the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) stands poised on the threshold of the twenty-first century. We have been engaged in intensive dialogue and discussion searching for new directions and approaches to experiencing the equality and partnership of women and men within the life of the churches. We look forward to continuing this discussion at the LWF Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong, China in 1997 when the LWF celebrates its fifty years of witness and service. We offer this report as a contribution to the preparations for this event.

We affirm the perspective of the General Secretary, Dr. Ishmael Noko, that this International Consultation on Women reflects a widening of the focus on issues related to women. These are issues which belong to the whole church because they concern both women **and** men. We rejoice that for the first time men, our brothers in Christ, were full participants in an International Consultation on Women. We welcome the participation of many LWF staff, including department directors, program and support staff. This emphasis on the participation of women **and** men from member churches and the LWF Secretariat is a clear affirmation of the Federation's commitment to building visible expressions of unity. We look to the sharpening and intensification of this focus in all LWF programs as we approach the twenty-first century.

We are grateful that all member churches were asked to appoint and send a liaison representative although all did not respond. Seventy-six LWF member

churches were represented. This participation along with representation from other Christian world communions, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and other ecumenical organizations, international nongovernmental and United Nations (UN) related agencies, the World Bank and the LWF Secretariat brought together 165 participants, twenty-five men and 140 women, at this event.

The participation and contribution of representatives from other Christian world communions, ecumenical organizations and international nongovernmental organizations and UN related agencies has enabled us to share common experiences. We have been challenged by their contribution and their call to action together on an ever increasing common agenda. A dialogue with a representative from the World Bank provided an opportunity to voice our concerns and to hear the bank's own interpretation of their policies.

"Today, if we stand tall, it is because we stand on the shoulders of those who were there before us."

Dr. Musimbi Kanyoro,
LWF Secretary for Women in Church and Society,
speaking at the LWF International Consultation on Women.

The African proverb, "Today, if we stand tall, it is because we stand on the shoulders of those who were there before us," reminds us of early women leaders in LWF history. We are grateful for the participation of some of them in this consultation. Their vision of a global com-

munity, their search for opening up opportunities for the leadership of women in the church, their desire for the partnership of women and men, prepared the way for the eventual inclusion of the Office for Women in Church and Society (WICAS) in the LWF structure. We have benefitted greatly from the vision and work of WICAS which has inspired and energized us in a global network.

Even a cursory look at past Assembly actions shows the struggle to move toward experiencing the partnership of women and men in the life of the Federation and the member churches. The first attempt to articulate a theological foundation for the partnership of women and men which was set forth in a statement by the LWF Sixth Assembly (Dar es Salaam, 1977) undergirds this consultation. This statement interpreted the biblical understanding of the image of God (Gen. 1:27) and oneness in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:28). It underscored the salvation given in Christ and the "promise of a new community between men and women." This promise gives us hope even though the visible realization is painfully slow. Nonetheless, "the realization of a new community in which men and women have equal rights and dignity", as the statement says, "should be an issue of high importance for the member churches of the LWF."

We stand firmly on the action taken by the LWF Seventh Assembly (Budapest, 1984) in adopting a representation formula to ensure specific increases in the percentage of women delegates at all subsequent assemblies. We expect the 50 percent women's representation in all aspects of the forthcoming LWF Assembly (Hong Kong, 1997).

The commitment signaled in the LWF Eighth Assembly Message (Curitiba, 1990) to "work out a clear plan of action in every member church which fully expresses the equality of men and women within the life of the church and enables the churches to benefit from the potential which women are able to give to all areas of church life" is an unfinished task in many churches. Accelerated efforts by these member churches are required to complete this task.

We thank God that we have not remained alone in the quest for women's full participation in the life of the church. The Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women, (1988-1998), initiated by the WCC, has been the catalyst for many Lutheran churches and especially the women in these churches to work for the full equality and partnership of women and men. In some parts of the Federation efforts related to the Ecumenical Decade are just getting underway and will extend beyond 1998. We support the mid-decade visits to churches presently carried out by teams of women and men under the leadership of the WCC.

We have heard the rising crescendo of women's voices throughout the world clamoring for equality, development, justice and peace. Reports from our sisters attending the UN Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, China, 1995) signalled a powerful agenda for the empowerment of women in nearly all sectors of society. The Beijing Declaration and the objectives and actions in twelve critical areas of concern in the Platform for Action accelerate the need for vigorous response by both governments and nongovernmental organizations. Like the thousands of women and men who participated in the UN Conference and Forum, **we**

aim to make a difference. We commit ourselves to work for the equality of men and women who both bear the image of God and to intensify efforts in order that the LWF may increasingly be an inclusive communion.

The World & Church through Women's Eyes

"We must face the challenges that the promotion of justice and awareness of rights for women brings."

Rev. Dr. Péri Rasolondraibe,
director, LWF Department for Mission and Development,
speaking at the LWF International Consultation on Women.

Reports from fifty member churches of the LWF representing all regions describe the social and church situation of women and identify pressing issues facing women and men which are integral to the credible witness of the church in the world today. Seven sectors of society mentioned most frequently in these reports and the situation of women in the church are highlighted below. Each sector has been augmented by information drawn from UN reports prepared for the Fourth UN World Conference on Women, the Platform for Action, the Beijing Declaration and the presentations and discussions at this consultation.

Human Rights for Women

Human rights for women are inherent in the fact of humanity. The protection and promotion of these rights is not in reality implemented. A number of circumstances has led to this tragic situation. Much of what women experience as every day abuse within their lives is still seen by communities as largely outside their un-

derstanding of human rights. Yet, it is common knowledge that because they are female, women are routinely subject to violation of their bodies, economic and political deprivation, torture and even murder. These abuses are usually left out of the human rights agenda because they have been largely invisible and/or dismissed as private family, cultural or religious rather than political matters. However, the violation of women on the basis of gender is political as it involves the domination of one group by another for the purpose of control of that group. Both nations and communities should be held responsible for perpetuating such abuse.

Another obstacle to the achievement of women's human rights comes from the perception by some that these rights are in conflict with cultural tradition or religious freedom. Women around the world are making it clear that their rights should not be sacrificed to such arguments. Culture, like human rights, is not static but responds to peoples' needs and interpretations in a given time and place.

Some steps forward have been made in the world community in terms of legal rights for women, but much remains to be done to enable women to exercise their rights. The UN Vienna World Conference on Human Rights (1993) resolved that "the human rights of women and of the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of the universal human rights." The UN has created a position for a special rapporteur on violence against women in order to expand the accountability for women's human rights. However, guarantees against gender-based discrimination are still absent in national constitutions and legislation or are undermined by the persistence of cultural traditions that subordinate

women. Mechanisms to enforce rights either do not exist or are difficult to access. Furthermore, subtle discrimination in employment practices and career development and dominant male cultures create a glass ceiling which hampers women's efforts to rise to top decision-making positions in many organizations. Few efforts have been made to revise women's under-representation in decision-making bodies. On the average, only 10 percent of the world's members of parliaments are female, and there are even fewer women at ministerial levels.

Many women do not know their basic human and legal rights. In some parts of the world, women still struggle for basic human rights such as food, shelter, health and education. Others are addressing legal rights such as property ownership, inheritance and political participation. The struggle begins at an early age. The right to life is denied by practices of infanticide. Girls as young as ten years may be legally forced into marriages by their families. The development in all communities of gender-sensitive perspectives in human rights is urgent and churches must take their responsibility in this agenda.

Poverty & Economic Issues

"From the vantage point of women, the objectives of economic policies should be to sustain life, to promote general human development, and to eradicate poverty."

Dr. Mariama Marjorie Williams,
Professor of Economics, New School for Social Research,
New York, USA.

Poverty is a complex, multi-dimensional problem with national and international domains. A growing proportion of women and households headed by women are living in poverty. An analysis of female poverty suggests that it is caused by the perpetual disadvantage of women with regards to their position in the labor market, lack of access to opportunities, resources, credit, land-ownership and inheritance, and minimal participation in decisionmaking. The global index of wages paid to women is 60-70 percent lower than to men. Only one fourth of this disparity can be explained by education and qualification differences. Households headed by women are more likely to be poor. Extreme rates of poverty (as high as 90 percent) exist among aboriginal women of all nations. A scant 1 percent of the world's property and wealth is owned by women. The majority of the working poor are women.

In the developing world, the number of rural women living in poverty has risen 50 percent in the last decade, versus 30 percent for men. At the same time, growing urbanization in a poor economy has led to impoverished urban ghettos. Because of war, conflict and

desertion, the number of households headed by women range from 30 percent to as high as 80 percent. Unstable economies, high debt loads, restructuring and globalization leave many governments unable to provide a basic standard of living or social services for women and their families. Misallocation and mismanagement by governments of the meager resources available also has diverse effects on the poverty of nations.

In the developed world, the spread of part-time, temporary and other forms of casual or non-standard employment means lower incomes for these workers, most of whom are women. It also means few or no benefits, little or no on-the-job training and few opportunities for advancement. In case of divorce, separation or widowhood, women face a three times greater risk of living in poverty. The UN estimates that it will take 450 years for women and men to be represented in equal numbers in the higher echelons of economic power.

The answer to women's poverty lies in their history of marginalization and isolation from the locus of decisionmaking and power over the structures of production, trade and finance. Women have little control over the factors that are crucial to their economic survival. They are therefore vulnerable to the economic systems and the economic policies that do not take them into account. Major changes are needed in economic decisionmaking locally, within nations and globally to address fundamental issues pertaining to the economic well-being of women.

Education

If you are female, chances are good you will be illiterate. One out of every three women in the world does not have the most basic of literacy skills, reading and writing. As a result, large numbers of women have little knowledge of history or current events and societal problems beyond their local area. Education is one of the most important means to give women these skills and the knowledge and self-confidence to participate fully in society. Basic education opens up access to technologies which also increase opportunities for the empowerment of women.

In the last decade advances have been made in the education of women. Despite this progress, the gap continues to exist in many countries in the enrollment ratios of girls to boys in primary, secondary and higher education institutions. The gap remains greater in African and Asian and Pacific regions than in Latin America and the Caribbean. The lowest levels of education for women are in Africa. Almost half of the children of primary school age are out of school. The majority of them are girls.

Education for girls and women is closely linked to social and economic benefits. Mothers who are educated are more likely to adopt desirable health and nutritional practices than those who are uneducated. Studies suggest that each additional year of schooling results in a 5 to 10 percent reduction in infant mortality. Educated women tend to have fewer children, slowing population growth. They also tend to encourage their girl children to become educated.

There is also a relationship between women's education and economic gains. Statistics indicate that every year a girl remains in school can result in a 10 to 20 percent increase in earnings. At the family level, as women gain access to better employment due to better education, families benefit through higher earnings.

Education is fundamental in overcoming myths, superstitions, cultural traditions and taboos that are detrimental to women. Strict definitions of women's work, early marriage, female genital mutilation and female submissiveness are cultural practices that can be eradicated by education. Unfortunately, education for women in all societies frequently includes socialization to a woman's "proper place" in society i.e. accepting a lower status and subordination as the proper order of the world. Gender-sensitive curricula, textbooks and training materials are needed to eliminate social stereotypes which diminish girl children and women as persons of worth and potential for contributing to society.

Improving access to education for girls and women and removing every obstacle including social and cultural barriers that hamper their active participation remains an urgent priority. Steady intentional leadership and support of both government and nongovernmental organizations including churches is necessary to meet the priorities for advancing the education of girls and women.

Health

"The health problems of communities are aggravated by lack of state support and are felt more by the female population".

Mr. Manuel Larreal,
Editor and Coordinator General of Acción Ecuménica, Caracas, Venezuela, speaking at the LWF International Consultation on Women.

Health is a basic human right for women. Primary health care, especially during pregnancy and childbirth is inadequate in many areas. Financial constraints, cultural and religious prohibitions and the work load inhibit many women from access to family planning and pre-natal care that would enable safe motherhood. Women are still dying unnecessarily in childbirth every day.

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that HIV/AIDS is in a pandemic state. By the end of 1995, it is estimated that 6 - 6.5 million women worldwide will be infected by HIV (excluding AIDS). Contaminated needles and blood products, HIV infected partners and infected mothers have caused HIV to become a growing epidemic among women and children. Few health services exist in either the developed or developing world to care for women with HIV/AIDS and their families. While the lament for lack of cure for AIDS still continues, it is unfortunate that governmental and nongovernmental organizations, including churches, have not given priority attention to education in regard to HIV/AIDS. Some churches spend a lot of

time and energy in moralizing this issue rather than caring for those who are already affected and providing the necessary education to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. This is an area that needs urgent attention. Both care and preventive education are urgently needed by the churches.

In addition to lack of access to proper health care, the work burden of women is in itself a hazard to their health. Rural women may walk many kilometers every day to carry clean water to their families. Women in urban slums struggle to make ends meet by informal entrepreneurship such as combing garbage for something to sell. Others take on any type of menial labor such as breaking stones or doing repetitive chores in an unhealthy environment which severely endangers their health.

Malnutrition and communicable diseases are more widespread as the number of women and children living in poverty increase. Poor sanitation, prevalent in both rural areas and urban ghettos, contributes to disease and infant mortality.

Churches often leave matters of health to governments and medical personnel. However, health is more than institutions of treatment and medicine. Health is about how people live daily and the impact of policies that affect people's lives. Churches have to be active in advocating for just policies and community education in the question of health. Churches are called to bring healing to people's lives.

Women in the Context of Family

Despite many social and economic changes in recent years, the family remains the basic unit of all societies. There is, however, a diversity of family forms and changing family needs. In some parts of the world, women marry at an older age than they used to and have fewer children. The number of divorces and desertions is increasing. The proportion of single-headed households is growing while family support networks are declining. In some countries, traditional extended families are gradually disappearing. Thus children and youth are separated from their grandparents who played a special role in their traditional education and socialization. Unstable family relationships leave women with the greatest load in caring for the family.

An increasing number of women are employed outside the home in many parts of the world. Yet women, whether or not they are in paid employment, working on farms, in family enterprises or their own business, are still largely responsible for the management of the home and the care of children. At the same time, women frequently have responsibility for the sick and the elderly. This phenomenon of double shift, double burden is characteristic of most households.

In general, the role of women in the family is only slowly changing. A sharing of family and household responsibilities, including family planning, child rearing and housework is needed. When men do not participate in family responsibilities, they miss out on developing close links with the family. Many are trapped in the image of the male as the "breadwinner", and therefore the one in whom power is centered. Transforming the

division of labor in the family offers the possibility for more fulfilling roles for both men and women. This benefits children, and gives women a better chance to participate in the community life beyond the home.

Policies and laws are needed to support the family in its diverse forms. Parental and maternity leave, health insurance and social security, flexible work schedules and provision of day-care centers are among the policies and services needed.

Sometimes the focus on the family by communities, including the church, has often excluded the concerns of single people both young and old. Family, marriage and having children are not the only options for living full lives and this needs to be affirmed by the churches.

Violence Against Women

"Violence against women in the family and society is pervasive and cuts across lines of income, class and culture and must be matched by urgent and effective steps to eliminate its incidence. Violence against women derives from their unequal status in Society."

(Resolution of the United Nations,
Economic and Social Council,
1990/15, May 24, 1990)

The many faces of violence against women are deeply etched in cultural and societal history. Violations of the human rights of women whether in the family, at the work place, in situations of armed conflict, or by social and religious institutions are worldwide. Physical, sexual

and psychological abuse and gender bias in administration of justice, in law and in cultural practices have as a common origin the use of a coercive form of power over women.

Ethnic, religious and political wars and conflicts have caused much female victimization, ranging from physical and sexual violence perpetrated by the State to systematic rape, kidnapping, torture and killing by the military. Economic, social and political situations such as poverty, unregulated working conditions and political repression have also placed women at risk of violence. Media and especially publicity advertisements and pornography depict women as objects of consumption, thus augmenting female subjugation.

There are other forms of violence related to custom, culture or religion. Some, although a source of cultural pride, are harmful to the well-being of girls and women. They include the practice of sati (self-immolation by widows), female genital mutilation and other initiation practices, widowhood rites, early marriage and the custom of dowry, male child preference and gender difference in nutrition, medical care and education.

All forms of violence are an everyday reality for many women and girl children. Even the home is a dangerous place for them. One out of every four women experience violence in their domestic relationships such as battering, psychological abuse, rape in marriage, child abuse and incest. Studies from around the world show rates of sexual abuse of girl children ranging from 33-50 percent. In every part of the world, girl children are forced or sold into prostitution. In Africa and some parts of Asia the number of sexually mutilated women and girls increased to 100 million in 1994. An additional two

million girls are estimated by the World Health Organization to be at risk of these practices each year.

The elderly and family members with disabilities may also be subject to ill-treatment. In extended families mothers-in-law are often violent towards their daughters-in-law. Female domestic servants are also in danger of being mistreated by the employing family. Despite the various types of violence that exist in the home, the most prevalent is the violence of husband against wife.

The psycho-social effects of violence against girl children and women undermines their self-esteem, and reinforces their inequality causing lifetime effects. Breaking the silence over the issue of violence against women is a major responsibility for the churches.

Environment

New technologies and human-made pollutants plague our planet greatly affecting the lives and health of the earth's inhabitants. Life sustaining resources are at risk due to pollution, over-population, and economic activity. Destruction of forests and the ozone layer causes climatic changes such as drought and flooding. Food crops and live-stock are adversely affected; desert expands resulting in less arable land. Hunger and malnutrition are the result. Water, a basic commodity for survival may be contaminated causing sickness and disease. Sustainable development is severely threatened. The use and testing of nuclear weaponry also contribute to deterioration of the environment.

Environmental degradation and poverty are closely interrelated. Women, especially, are affected as possibili-

ties for income-generating activities are reduced. Because women in developing countries generally bear the burden of caring for the household, they have to cope with increased difficulties of the day-to-day survival of their families. In industrialized countries, in particular, the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production aggravates poverty and imbalances.

The fetuses of pregnant women are vulnerable to the effects of nuclear tests and wastes. Nuclear pollution affects the unborn child and may cause cancer, deformities, disabilities and even death.

Women of every class, culture and color have organized for environmental change. Being the main care providers, they are the first to recognize environmental problems and the effects upon themselves, the survival of their families and of society itself. However, women remain largely absent at all levels of policy formulation and decisionmaking in natural resources and environmental management, conservation, protection and rehabilitation.

Women in the Church

At the LWF Eighth Assembly (Curitiba 1990), the LWF member churches committed themselves to intensify efforts to be a sign of an inclusive communion. They asked for "a clear plan of action which expresses the equality of men and women within the life of the churches and enables the churches to benefit from the potential which women are able to give". By the close of 1995, twelve of the 122 member churches reported having developed a plan. Sixty-seven churches have appointed liaison persons.

Even though some churches have made progress, we are still far away from the realization of the goals and commitments that have been made.

The following description of some general trends will substantiate these claims:

— In all churches, lay and ordained women are still not fully participating as partners on equal terms. In number, they make up more than half of the church. In the parish lay women are often described as the pillars of church life, doing a lot of practical work, raising funds, educating children and doing diaconal work and stewardship.

  However, women are not recognized for the work they do and they are only partially integrated into the decision-making structures of the church. Even fewer are found in the hierarchy of church structures.

— This pattern, clearly recognizable in every church, is interlinked with biblical interpretation and teaching, the written and/or unwritten laws of the

churches, and spoken and unspoken values. This pattern tends to reduce women's self-esteem and worth as human beings and demoralizes them in their struggle for full participation and recognition.

The churches do not utilize the talents and the potential of the women in their midst. This causes pain to the women and is a great loss to the church.

It is a sad fact that most churches keep silent on issues that affect women directly. Regrettably, churches which have spoken openly on matters such as domestic violence and sexual abuse in families and the church, fail to develop strategies to handle these serious violations.

— One obvious and critical issue is the question of ordination of women. One third of LWF member churches do not ordain women. A few are initiating processes which could lead to denying the ordination of women. Furthermore, it is a fact that in the churches that do ordain women and have done so for years, women are still not in senior positions. Some have very restricted opportunities and others have more problems than their male counterparts in receiving a call from a congregation.

— Feminist theology is a tool for critical reflection on the Christian tradition and offers new approaches to how theological education is defined, formed, and structured as well as to the spiritual growth of the church. However, churches do not give feminist theology a significant voice and continue to contribute to its marginalization within institutions for

theological education and research. Despite this, feminist theology is making a positive contribution to theological thought, ecumenical worship and women's self-awareness.

Critical Areas for Action

We have dialogued and reflected on these realities of life for women in our global society and church. These realities have been made concrete to us by the stories of faith and life, of courage and of connection, of injustice and pain shared at this consultation. We have been summoned to respond with clarity of vision and commitment to act.

Six critical areas require priority attention as the twenty-first century approaches. These areas, all identified in the reports on the status of women in LWF member churches, were examined and discussed at this 1995 LWF International Consultation on Women. The six areas, all interrelated, are:

1. **Living in Communion,**
2. **Sitting at the Table as Equals,**
3. **Ordination of Women,**
4. **Education and Leadership Training,**
5. **Economic Justice,**
6. **Safe Places for Women and Children in Church and Society.**

All areas are global and responses must be shaped in both regional and local settings. These six areas all interrelated in their effects on the lives of women and men often require a holistic response. In some cases, the issues identified need, first of all, to be placed on the agenda of the LWF Assembly, Council or Secretariat, or individual member churches for policy decision. Many call for action now.

Living in Communion

"Communion is mutual participation."

Prof. Ruth Besha,
University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania,
speaking at the LWF International Consultation on Women.

The historic declaration of the eighth Assembly in Curitiba (1990) that the LWF is a communion of churches stirs our hopes and heightens our expectations. We are part of a spiritual communion bound together in the Holy Spirit through our common faith in the triune God.

Yet we recognize the brokenness of our relationships. Tensions and conflicts within Lutheran churches around the globe cause pain and anguish. They affect adversely the ministry and mission of the whole church. In local settings, congregations and even families at times are divided and human relationships are broken. Reconciliation between clergy and laity, leaders and members, between factions, between women and men is sorely and urgently needed.

Reconciliation and restoration is also needed in our relationships with others who share a common faith in God and Jesus Christ. The significance of the commitment of the LWF "to be fully involved in ecumenical encounter and cooperation at all levels of church life" (Curitiba Assembly Message, 1990) has been reinforced by our ecumenical partners in the international community who are grappling with similar critical areas of concern. Realization of this fact compels all of us in various

structures to open more avenues for ecumenical cooperation globally, regionally and locally. The commitment to act together reflects mutual affirmation and unity in Christ and the intention to be bearers of mercy and justice in the world.

However, beyond commitment and cooperation through structures, too few women are involved in international and regional conciliar organizations and in the bilateral dialogues. Why is this so when women share the vision of the unity and wholeness of the church as the body of Christ? Why is this so when women in local parishes are the first to work and share with others across denominational lines? The ecumenical movement is strengthened when both women and men, lay and ordained, are able to contribute their perspectives and experiences.

As part of a serving communion, we are called to be in solidarity with indigenous people, especially women, who daily struggle to maintain their identity and survive in complex societies. The suffering and pain of indigenous people impels the whole communion to seek justice and to support the self-empowerment of indigenous people.

"The concept of 'communion' seeks to tell us that the church as a communion of individuals is always a communion in Christ."

Rev. Elisabeth Parmentier,
Research Assistant at the Center of Ecumenical Research,
Strasbourg, France, speaking at the LWF International
Consultation on Women.

Living in communion is sharing Christ, "Koinonia". "Our understanding of communion begins with the biblical teaching that we are united in Christ and therefore in fellowship with each other. Life in communion implies practical attitudes and actions. It means mutual acceptance of each other, sharing concern for the physical and spiritual well-being of each other in all aspects of life." (Curitiba Assembly Message, 1990)

Communion has specific meaning for men and women in the church. It means that women must share fully and equally in the life of the church. Living in communion implies that decisionmaking happens at a "round table" where space is continuously being created for everybody to come, to sit down, to receive, to give and to exchange.

All pyramidal notions of church structure vanish in the ecclesiology of communion where responsibility and power is shared between women and men. However, the reluctance of men in the church structures to share power has resulted in few women being in leadership roles. Many women, although willing, have not been able to reach their full potential and contribute their gifts to the communion. The communion is poorer without the contributions of women.

Many churches make commitments which remain on paper and are not put into practice. Some churches have not taken a stand on the inclusion of women in the ordained ministry or other leadership positions within the structure of the church. While the Budapest and Curitiba Assemblies called for the ordination of women, these calls have still not been heeded in some churches and that causes pain to the communion. In many churches women have been denied the opportunity for

theological education. In some others, ordained women experience the threat of having their ordination suspended or nullified.

Sharing, fellowship, participation, solidarity and mutual accountability are the practical steps for living in communion. There is a need to implement these visions and theological principles. When we understand and take seriously that we must give account of our faith and resources, both spiritual and material, not only to God but to each other, we will experience a deeper, more profound meaning of living in communion.

WE PROPOSE

- LWF Council initiate in consultation with member churches a process to ensure mutual accountability for those decisions already agreed upon jointly in Assemblies, Council meetings or regional meetings.
- LWF Secretariat and member churches continue to intensify exchange programs and other activities in all regions as a means of strengthening communication and connections within the Lutheran communion.
- Member churches
  - take concrete actions to implement all decisions and commitments made by the communion of churches.
  - evaluate their structures and processes to identify and eliminate barriers which hinder the

church from benefiting from the gifts of women.

— examine present relationships between lay and ordained women and men and develop strategies to strengthen interdependence and decrease conflict and competition.

— facilitated by the LWF Secretariat when appropriate, initiate a process of reconciliation and healing between men and women in situations of tension and conflict.

SITTING AT THE TABLE AS EQUALS

Concerning the why and how and what and
who of ministry,
One image keeps surfacing:
A table that is round.

Ms. Christine Grumm,
LWF Deputy General Secretary, speaking at the LWF International Consultation on Women (quoting from "The Search of a Round Table" by Chuck Lathrop from *A Gentle Presence*, Washington D.C., Appalachian Documentation (ADOC), 1977, pp 5-8. Reprinted in Janet Schaffran and Pat Kogat, *More than Words: Prayer and Ritual for Inclusive Communities*,
New York: Meyer Stone Books, 1988, pp. 159 - 162.)

Who sits at the tables in the LWF and the member churches? Why are not more women sitting at these tables? These are persistent questions raised by women throughout LWF history with good reason. For example, a recent LWF survey showed that while the number of women delegates at the Eighth Assembly (1990) increased to 41 percent as compared with 34 percent at the Seventh Assembly (1984), women are woefully missing in LWF sponsored theological events, ecumenical dialogues and meetings of elected church leaders. Both lay and ordained women are under-represented in decisionmaking structures in nearly all member churches.

Why the persistent questions? For women, it is not merely a matter of larger numbers. Rather, full participation of women along with men reflects their equal-

ity before God. Both are baptized into the body of Christ and receive the gifts of the holy Spirit for use in the life of the church. There is no distinction when women and men gather around the table of the Lord to receive Holy Communion.

The commitment of the LWF to be a communion of churches challenges any and all efforts which exclude anyone from involvement in all aspects of church life based on their gender, age, race or physical condition. Communion, implies commitment and unity in the Lord. The churches are to be inclusive, giving access to the greatest possible diversity and enabling women to share fully.

Why aren't women sitting at the table?

The reasons are varied. In some situations, church constitutions do not provide for equal participation of men and women. Biblical interpretation has enforced women's subordination. Throughout history, people have been socialized to give women a lower status. This hinders the responsibility of the growth and expression of their skills. Men expect women to play by men's rules. Women, when conscious of this, have no such desire.

Many men today have difficulties in understanding women's feelings of exclusion. On the one hand, some men are sensitive to these feelings but do not know how to respond. On the other hand, some men feel threatened, fearing loss of power and control. Gender bias is pervasive and is legitimized by tradition, theology and church practices as well as by cultural norms and customs.

What happens when women and men sit at the table as equals?

The use of language such as "sitting at the table as equals" means that at such a table there can be no first and no last, no better and no worse. There is access for all. An atmosphere is created that is safe for people to share their concerns without threat of being marginalized, ridiculed or excluded. Agenda are open, not secret, and information is not withheld. Diversity of leadership styles is expected. Different perspectives are welcomed particularly as they challenge theology, tradition and long-time practices. Feminist theology is one of those perspectives which women can bring as a contribution to the table. The image of the round table best serves a new relationship of equals. At this table not only is there no first and no last, but there is no "this side" over against "that side", and furthermore, there are no corners.

Who shapes the round table?

One of the key understandings about being an inclusive community is that when marginalized people join, the community will begin to look different. History is full of examples of how marginalized groups have attempted to get a share in power and how those in power have resisted the sharing of power. Both groups have used the Bible to validate their claim. This reflects the disturbing but unavoidable fact, that the Bible can be used in such ways to support opposing claims.

Professor Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, keynote speaker at the consultation, addressed this issue as she traced two different currents within the Scriptures. She identified one of these currents as "kyriarchical", meaning a model centered on the "kyrios", master or lord of the house. This kyriarchical model is the one that is often referred to as patriarchal. It is the model of lord-

ship that has been imposed in church and society and whose victims are not only women, but also children and men who are not in power positions. This social and political model is the one that also developed into imperialism, colonialism, and other forms of oppression.

A second alternative model that also appears in the Bible is the one that Schüssler-Fiorenza calls "the discipleship of equals". It is based on the ideal of equal participation and equal rights of every person joining the group, in an egalitarian democracy. Its functioning is inscribed in the Jewish traditions of the Kingdom of God, of the Prophets and of the wisdom of sages. It also appears throughout the writings of the New Testament and has provided impetus for many reformation and liberation movements.

Whether or not the choice is made to change the kyriarchical model, the decision will bring consequences in the way leadership styles, individual styles and group dynamics are shaped and experienced.

Deliberate steps toward a table of equals require developing strategies that address the biblical and cultural norms for participation. It also requires examination of the dynamics of power between women and men, conscientization of both women and men on aspects of their socialization which distort their identity as equal

before God, and exploring models for the church which are found in Scripture.

WE PROPOSE

- LWF Secretariat, member churches and their women's organizations initiate gender analysis to expose the power relationships which prevent full participation of women in LWF and in church structures
- LWF Secretariat and member churches initiate
  - through workshops and seminars gender education for changing behavioral patterns and enhancing confidence building of women
  - critical evaluation from a gender perspective of their form of work and style of leadership, and
  - a gender balance employment policy.
- LWF Secretariat ensure that the staff of the Department for Theology and Studies include a theologian with a background in Feminist Theology in order to help develop women's perspectives in studies and discussions in the LWF and in member churches.
- Member churches of the LWF on the basis of their membership in a confessional communion accountable to all other members, examine the cultural norms and customs and biblical interpretations used which diminish or exclude participation of women.

Ordination of Women

"Theologically, women are to be included in the ordained ministry not on the basis of equal rights with men (no one has a right *to the ordained ministry), but on the basis of the nature of the Church as the eschatological sign of God's reign."*

Rev. Dr. Eugene Brand, LWF Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs, speaking at the LWF International Consultation on Women.

The church is called to be a sign of God's Kingdom on earth. In God's Kingdom everybody belongs, both men and women, old and young from all classes and nations. (Gal. 3:26-28). In baptism the people of God are called to carry forward the work of Christ in the ministry of proclamation and worship, witness and service. Both lay and ordained have a common calling, to work together and to depend on each other as equals in the Kingdom of God.

The ordained ministry is given by God and open to all. We rejoice that two-thirds of the LWF member churches ordain women and in many churches ordained women are respected by the congregations and by the society in general. A few churches have made further progress by installing female bishops. At present there are only six. Two are in the USA, one in Germany, one in Norway and two in Denmark. Even though bishops who are women are few in number, they are of great symbolic significance to many as a sign of an inclusive community.

However, some churches refuse to ordain women. Others ordain women but do not fully integrate them into the life of the church on equal terms with men. Some churches are struggling to decide about ordaining women and are engaging their members in discussion. We affirm these efforts and urge their continuation.

Lutheran churches which do not ordain women explain this decision in a variety of ways such as having to live side by side with other Christian churches and faiths which do not ordain women. Others are influenced by missionary societies from the North who threaten to withdraw their support if the national church takes steps to ordain women. Tradition and cultural reasons and biblical passages are also used to exclude women as ordained ministers. Male clergy fear sharing power with women. Churches which use any excuse to deny ordination of women close their eyes to the full vision of the Kingdom of God proclaimed in the New Covenant made by the blood of Jesus Christ.

The church cannot use culture, suppressive practices and traditions as excuses for not ordaining women. The church has roots in the culture and serves in the culture, but at the same time must evaluate critically cultural norms and values which impair the vision of God's Word. Similarly, the church cannot lean on safeguarding relations with other religious bodies as a reason for excluding women from the ordained ministry. Ordination of women can never be traded for the sake of ecumenism. On the contrary, ordination of women is a treasured gift to ecumenism.

The ordination of women has been addressed consistently throughout LWF history. Important resolutions were made by the LWF at the Seventh Assembly

(Budapest, 1984). The resolution addressed to churches that do not ordain women urged these churches "to take specific steps towards an affirmative action". Six years later, the Eighth Assembly (Curitiba, 1990), recognized that the ordination of women was still not possible in some churches and made the commitment to "undertake through consultation and cooperation of all member churches and in a climate of mutual respect, practical efforts to open the way for women to enter the ordained ministry of all member churches." This commitment was reaffirmed by the LWF Council in 1995 (Windhoek, Namibia) in reaction to churches who want to reverse their earlier decision to ordain women. The consultative process with member churches requested in Curitiba, however, has not been initiated. It has to be initiated without delay.

The Seventh Assembly's resolution also urged "the LWF member churches that do ordain women to develop policies that ensure equality in service opportunities and benefits." In claiming the implementation of these resolutions, the churches have tended to paint a rosy picture that is not in tune with the reality. Even though the majority of ordained women are well received, from what we have heard and observed, there are still some ordained women who experience a variety of problems. They are not treated as well as their male colleagues by:

- receiving lower salaries
- having difficulties getting placement
- being held back in advancement
- not having opportunities for professional development and personal growth

— being limited in areas of ministry and service.

Most female ministers as well as many male ministers experience great problems in combining ministerial work with the necessity of taking care of the family. Many churches do not have clear policies on maternal rights and family benefits.

In some churches there are no or few female role models for women clergy. Church structures and the shaping of the role of the clergy are male oriented and dominated by men. Such structures constrain the ordained women. This causes a lack of proper utilization of their talent and potentials.

The failure of churches to challenge and provide moral, spiritual and material support diminishes women ministers. Isolation of women ministers by their male colleagues and in some cases even by the congregation distorts living in communion. LWF Assembly and LWF Council actions are not for the future. The future is now. We cannot wait any longer. Affirmative actions should be taken now.

WE PROPOSE

- LWF Secretariat
  - identify those churches that do not ordain women and initiate immediately a process of dialogue in accordance with commitments made by the Eighth LWF Assembly in 1990 and the LWF Council in 1995.
  - facilitate an exploratory study on behalf of the member churches of models of ordained ministry which take into account what women contribute to the ordained ministry.
- Member churches, facilitated by the above exploratory study, seriously engage in reshaping the ordained ministry for the benefit of the church.

Education & Leadership Training

"To empower a woman with education is to empower the church and society."

Dr. Ishmael Noko,
LWF General Secretary, speaking at the LWF International Consultation on Women

Education is one of the most important means to empower women with the knowledge, positive attitudes, values and skills necessary to develop critical thinking, assertiveness, self-confidence and full partnership in society. Education is multi-dimensional and complex and runs as a thread through every aspect of a person's life and development.

The areas of need for the education of women include leadership, education for life and advocacy education.

Leadership Education

It is time to "open up tables", i.e. the decision-making bodies to women. Some women are ready for leadership roles; others must be equipped with the necessary skills. The initial and perhaps most important requirement is self-confidence and assertiveness. If a woman has been socialized to believe that she should not speak when men are present, or that her contributions are less valuable, then obviously no amount of leadership skills training will equip her to participate equally with men. Assertiveness and confidence building cannot be taught

in a one-day seminar. This process of empowering women must begin early in childhood and continue throughout a woman's life. The education that is given in the home, in Sunday schools, and confirmation classes, in worship life and through sermons should all undergird the process of confidence building.

Leadership training needs a context to define its contents. The church and society need leaders equipped with different skills so that their total ministry or service benefits from expertise of many people. Women need leadership training in many areas, but the most obvious include administration, management, finance and various communication skills, all necessary for leadership in today's world. Social analysis is also important for interpreting the issues within the context of society.

In the church context, equipping women as leaders also means theological education. Theological education can take the form of formal schooling in a seminary or another institute of higher learning. The time spent studying theology as a discipline is worthy for the person, the church and the society even if that trained person does not serve in a leadership role as a pastor.

People can also be equipped with theological education through informal means. For example, in Latin America there are study programmes for women leaders (Pastoral de la Mujer) in the congregations which have been designed locally and are supported by WICAS. Through in- service courses, trained theologians accompany and guide women in the understanding of basic theological concepts, biblical interpretation, and service in the church. This type of educational experience should be explored in other regions in order to

make theological education possible for women when more formal means are not possible.

Women often do not have the same access to theological education as men for various reasons. Women are not sought out, endorsed or put forward by their own church for theological studies. For some churches this is tied to their negative attitudes towards the ordination of women, while for others it is general lack of vision for women's theological education. The absence of applications for theological education for women is especially visible for churches in Africa and Asia. The LWF scholarship programme also reports a significant lack of applications for higher education for women candidates even though churches are aware of the requirement that at least 40 percent of the funds are to be given to female applicants.

Often churches are reluctant to prioritize women candidates in relation to all applications submitted to the LWF. It also seems that churches many times do not seem to be on the lookout for well qualified women for endorsement, giving the impression that there are no such women. The applications of women endorsed by churches are in general of less quality than those of men. These are some of the issues which have to be dealt with if women are to be equipped for leadership in the church and in the LWF.

Leadership education must include a clear analysis of power. Power is embodied in structure and is a relationship between participants in a community. Certain images of God underlie the use of power and together

with biblical interpretation, contribute to the shape and functioning of church structure. Potential women leaders must be aware of the current hierarchical structures and their operation, different leadership styles, types of power and its use, and the impact of all of these on both access to participation and the quality of the decision-making process. As more women move into decision-making bodies, it may be possible to revise current structures, to "round the table" to ensure a more open and inclusive community.

Education for Life

There is a growing consensus that education, regardless of who receives it contributes to sustainable development. When women are the recipients, the benefits to society are even greater.

An educated mother raises a healthier family. As important as doctors are to medical care in the health of a nation, 1 percent rise in women's literacy has three times the effect of a 1 percent rise in the number of doctors. Education gives women more capacity to make responsible decisions on their reproductive life. Education also opens ways for women to improve their economic status. Families benefit through higher earnings as women gain access to better opportunities.

Education for women improves their status on many levels and enhances their lives. They are able to make more independent decisions and stand up for themselves. The benefits multiply to future generations. Women when educated, tend to encourage their children to become educated.

In developing countries in particular, many women, especially those living in rural areas, are illiterate. Although they are largely responsible for the health and welfare of family members, and in many societies grow a good part of the country's food, these women are often deprived of the very means to perform these functions more efficiently. In South Asia and Africa, the illiteracy rate for women is over 80 percent , and even higher for women over thirty years of age. The drop-out rate is much higher for girls than for boys in primary and secondary school.

Favoring education for boys over girls is not exclusively an issue of the developing world; it is a global problem. The ratio of boys to girls remains the same in primary and secondary school when education is compulsory. At the post-secondary level, boys significantly outnumber girls. The issue of the drop-out of girls from schools is a great concern that must be addressed.

Women's access to science and technical areas remains limited. In several countries throughout the world male students, beyond secondary school, outnumber female students by at least three to one in scientific and technical fields. In the U.S.A., according to a recent study, girls are excluded from equal education through stereotyping and prejudice, particularly in areas such as mathematics, science and technology. As preparation for the twenty-first century, women in all regions should be encouraged to enter new fields of study including science and technology. These gender disparities should be forcefully addressed.

Advocacy Education

Advocacy education is needed for awareness raising and achieving justice. Many of the pressing issues facing women today are justice and human rights issues. They need first of all to be addressed with education to raise awareness. Often those affected by injustice, as well as those in power, are not aware of the issues and especially the right to speak out and advocate for change.

Knowing people and their needs and the issues that call for response is essential. An advocate is an intercessor, publicly pleading on behalf of others for conditions that can reduce, even eliminate, suffering and nurture the fulness of human life in community. It may mean speaking words of judgment to those in power when the cry of the powerless is disregarded. An advocate may assume multiple roles as an adviser or motivator, an educator or planner, an ombudsperson or lawyer. Facts based on empirical data and law, policy and binding agreements are essential.

An important part of advocacy education is the knowledge of how to bring about change within a particular context. The tasks include social analysis, theological and ethical reflections as well as methods of presenting issues to a targeted forum. Too often, the Bible has been used to rationalize oppression and injustice. Women have been told that they are to be subservient, submissive and silent because of selective interpretations of the Bible. The results are widespread negative actions affecting women, ranging from being denied positions of leadership, ordination, and even basic rights, to violence from partners and from others in society. Women need advocacy education to confront all these contradictions

and to bring positive change in both the church and society.

WE PROPOSE

- Member churches
  - accept the diverse gifts and styles of women that result from leadership training and experience, empower women leaders to participate fully in the life of the church in all levels of decisionmaking.
  - intensify their efforts in making theological education available to women and facilitate the advancement of women by giving women opportunities for skills training and higher education in all other areas.
  - intensify programs to combat illiteracy among women and initiate new programs where they do not exist.
  - develop educational materials which include theological and ethical reflection on justice and human rights issues as they relate to women.
  - advocate for national legislation which insures legal rights for women, and to see that these rights are safeguarded for women in order to enhance women's participation in the church.
  - enable their members to have training for lobbying and advocacy for more active involvement in decision-making in church and society.

— The LWF Secretariat seek ways to make scholarship information accessible directly to women and take steps to dialogue with churches on the barriers that prevent women from benefitting from the educational resources in the Federation.

Economic Justice

Poverty has a woman's face. The majority of the working poor around the world are women. They do not possess economic power. At all levels of society women do not share equality with men in being able to control and manage the many activities undertaken for profit which are concerned with the distribution and consumption of goods and services. The end result for women at the household level in both developed and developing countries is the necessity of initiating survival strategies which revolve around their traditional reproductive roles.

Women in developing countries are caught in a web of deprivation and inequality emanating from worldwide economic processes and the ways resources are shared. Women and children are the majority of the people living in absolute poverty. This is primarily because worldwide, women comprise the majority of the dispossessed, the refugees and the unemployed. For millions of women the day-to-day reality consists of the grim and frustrating search for food, fuel and water. This situation far from abating appears to be worsening with each new economic policy shift. Each such shift tends to contribute to a declining real wage, increasing inequality and rising food prices. The picture that is emerging is disheartening. Across the globe, economic insecurity due to rapid changes in the world economy has made women's lives increasingly vulnerable to exploitation and violence. In most countries, North or South, in addition to the day-to-day struggle for food and shelter

women are fighting against rape, domestic violence and crimes.

Poverty is a persistent problem of injustice and its eradication should be at the top of the development agenda. Economic growth has not led automatically to equitable distribution or redistribution of resources and income, especially to the poorest section of society.

Many countries of the South are heavily indebted to governments and international financial institutions in the North. Between 1970 and 1992 the total debt of developing countries grew fifteen times (from US$100 billion to US$1500 billion; in the 1980's' it was US$650 billion). Total debt service on this debt as of 1992 is US$160 billion. This is more than double the flow of official development assistance and approximately US$60 billion more than the inflow of private capital to developing countries. Thus after ten years of structural adjustment and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) debt management, many developing countries remain as heavily indebted as they were at the beginning of the crisis in the 1980's.

The overall result of structural adjustment policies has been to increase poverty, increase conflicts and violence within the home and the community. In some cases such as in the Pacific Islands the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP's) have been linked to struggles over customary land tenure as the attempt to privatize and extend market relations come up against traditional structures which are seen as obstacles to development. Coercive labor practices have also seemed to intensify with the opening up of many economies. This occurs because governments seek to ensure "reasonable" wage levels to attract multinational

corporations. Strong migration currents either from the countryside to the big cities or from one country to another have further heightened the crisis.

Putting the world on the path toward sustainable development which is human-centered and linked with the quality of life and poverty alleviation is recognized as a pressing international priority. Sustainable development aims to satisfy human needs without jeopardizing the resource base on which future generations depend.

In recent years, there has been explicit recognition that both poverty and development have a gender dimension. Studies around the globe have shown that there is a strong correlation between the economic status of women and the progress achieved in alleviating poverty. Empowering women and improving their status is essential to realizing the full potential of economic, political and social development. Even institutions such as the World Bank are now promoting investments in women.

One way to empower women economically is to enable women to become literate in economics. Women often feel powerless to influence anything connected to economics simply because they have not made the connections between their daily lives and economics. While women in fact contribute mightily to the economy as workers, home-makers, managers of their own business, their absence in setting economic policies means that they do not influence those policies. Economic education is vital for women.

Another way to empower women is to make credit available to them. The recent development records show that whenever and wherever women have been given credit to set up micro-enterprises, they have proved

themselves to be competent and responsible entrepreneurs. The files of international and ecumenical lending institutions such Women's World Banking, Ecumenical Church Loan Fund, the Ecumenical Development Cooperative Society, the UN Development Fund and women's cooperatives are full of successful case studies. Women know the value of money. They use it judiciously to invest in small, creative enterprises. They are a good risk, since they invariably repay the loans they receive. On any objective criteria, their credit-worthiness should be rated far higher than is the case now. Credit is empowerment.

Funding of projects and programs which benefit women has the potential to empower women economically but sometimes it can also be crippling to local initiatives and corruptive to donors and recipients. The power of the donor is often transferred to the leaders who are entrusted with the management of the agency's funds. Women are not exempted from this corruptive effect but at the moment, women do not have access to these leadership positions. When the sharing of resources through development aid is done with mutual respect between the donors and the recipients, it can enhance possibilities for responsible partnership.

"We know very well that mere charity or transfer of resources will never create sustainable development and a just world. The role of funding agencies has to be questioned, re-thought and revised."

Dr. Margaretha Ringström,
Director, Church of Sweden Aid, Uppsala, Sweden, speaking at the LWF International Consultation on Women.

Development aid should always be understood as a sharing of God's resources entrusted to us human beings. The concern about sharing is rooted in the Old Testament theology of covenanting. Sharing should not be merely seen as a donation possibility or even a merciful way of protecting the weak and the poor, but rather should be a community way of expressing justice through the sharing of power and material goods. The relationship between donors and recipients must incorporate mutual accountability and the fulfillment of commonly agreed upon objectives. Development aid should never be an end to itself. Rather it should be an expression of a common commitment to the values of justice.

The LWF is involved in development, mission, communication and relief programs and projects. Sensitivity to women in programs and projects funded by the LWF must be ensured. A resolution adopted by the Seventh Assembly (Budapest, 1984) urged that "emphasis should be given to the particular involvement of women, not only in addressing their needs in situations of hunger and poverty, but also in planning, leadership and the implementing of programs." There are many new issues which have become apparent to the development debate, especially in the recent UN world conferences, particularly in the World Summit on Social Development, (Copenhagen, 1995) and in the Fourth UN World Conference on Women, (Beijing, 1995). Increasing attention to gender inequalities in relation to poverty and economic justice is one of the new issues.

WE PROPOSE

- LWF Secretariat and member churches
  - promote economic literacy for women through workshops, seminars and consultations.
- LWF Secretariat, member churches and supporting agencies
  - continuously revise their funding policies in accordance with new developments in questions of gender and economic justice
  - intensify the development of gender-sensitive policies and practices for the planning, monitoring and evaluation of all projects.
- LWF Secretariat
  - work on a proposal in consultation with various program and project committees to set a percentage target of the total budgets approved for LWF departments to support programs, projects and other activities which empower women.
  - encourage member churches to explore possibilities of developing relationships with local investment and credit programs accessible to their constituencies, in order to reduce dependency on international aid.
  - ensure that the programs of WICAS are well funded and that the Special Fund for the Promotion of Women is increased and made known to all member churches.

Safe Places for Women & Children in Church & Society

"In facing the occurrences of violence a female pastor cannot remain silent."

Rev. Basa Hutabarat,
pastor of the Protestant Christian Batak Church, Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia, speaking at the LWF International Consultation on Women.

Everywhere and in all ages, women have been victims of violence. Violence against women derives essentially from the lower status accorded to women in the family and in society. Violence is a function of the belief, fostered in all cultures, that men by nature are superior and privileged and therefore should have the right of exercising power and control over women. Women are perceived as objects and not as the subjects they are. Culture and tradition, often reflected in literature, music, art, national laws and policy documents of institutions help to perpetuate the idea of male dominance.

In many ethnic, religious and political conflicts in the world, women have been the victims of terrorism and the targets for rape and other sexual assault. Sexual abuse by soldiers is widespread and rape, mistreatment, forced pregnancy are used systematically. Most women who are subject to violence during war take no active part in the conflict. Physical and sexual abuse is not only destructive of women but also used as a deliberate tactic to intimidate and undermine entire communities and inflict deep and lasting damage.

Threats and damage to girls and women come heavily from within society and family. The plight of the girl child begins even before birth. Selective abortion of female fetuses and female infanticide has increased in several Asian countries. Female infants are often killed within a few days of birth or, because they are female, die from mistreatment and malnutrition. This is so common that it makes an impact on population statistics in several areas within these countries.

On a very large scale, girls are also subject to cruel and life-threatening practices which are integrated into the culture as a normal part. The cruel practice of genital mutilation in Africa, the Middle East, some parts of Asia and among migrant communities living in other parts of the world leaves the vast number of victims with serious physical and psychological damage for the rest of their lives. Worldwide, women are victims of trafficking and involuntary prostitution. This kind of slavery, sometimes linked to extreme poverty or deceptive international networks of criminal activities, results from the general attitude of discrimination and treating women as objects.

Domestic violence and sexual abuse are the most secret of the secret areas within society and church. The secrecy is abhorrent because the problem is so common and grave, deeply damaging women's lives with long-term effects. The home is often idolized and rarely questioned as an unsafe place for children and women.

The women's movement was the first to expose problems of domestic violence and sexual abuse. Violence against women is one of the twelve critical areas of concern identified in Platform of Action adopted by the Fourth UN World Conference on Women (Beijing,

1995). It is urgent that churches speak openly about domestic violence and sexual abuse. Some churches are beginning to address these issues. Yet the process is slow and not integrated in all aspects of church life.

It is even harder for the churches to recognize fully the gravity and extent of sexual harassment and sexual abuse within the churches. Children, confirmands, women seeking consultation may be at risk. Not even the church is a safe place. The understanding of the nature of domestic violence and the presence of sexual abuse within the church is only superficially addressed. The blame is still very often placed on the victim and not on the perpetrator. There is a lack of policies to address the problems and to deal with individual incidents. Effective help to victims is not given priority.

Information and awareness building is therefore essential for the congregation and for church personnel. Churches need to look critically into their own history and how they deal with these issues. Churches are expected to be responsible and build trust and confidence in this area. The church should be a safe place for everyone.

LWF Assembly resolutions in 1984 and 1990 and subsequent LWF Council actions have provided impetus for member churches to address the subject of violence against women. **A Clear Plan of Action** based on commitments made by the LWF Eighth Assembly (Curitiba, 1990) and adopted by the LWF Council in 1992 proposes strategies to be undertaken in this area. The aim is to bring healing and wholeness to injured girls and women in both the church and in society and to prevent violence in the future.

Since violence against women has finally been brought into the open and its appalling magnitude made visible, churches must act now and join forces with other organizations within society that are striving to make churches, homes and communities a safe place for children and women. This is one of the main agenda items of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women.

WE PROPOSE

- Member churches
  - act upon the resolutions on violence against women adopted by the LWF Assemblies (Budapest, 1984 and Curitiba, 1990) and LWF Council meetings (Kristiansand, 1993 and Geneva, 1994)
  - establish procedures, designate personnel and/or structures to deal with harassment and abuse within the church.
  - denounce and combat girl infanticide and the harmful and cruel initiation practices including female genital mutilation.
  - take a stand against trafficking of women for prostitution and work for conditions which recognize women as subjects, not objects.
  - commit themselves to the WCC-initiated activities of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women.
  - give priority to the dissemination of information and education on violence in its various

forms through curricula for Sunday school, confirmands, Bible and theological schools, and for elementary and secondary schools run by the church.

- explore from a theological point of view the present cultural and social values which degrade and dehumanize women and spawn violence against them.

— LWF Secretariat initiate a study on culture and violence against women and make the findings available to member churches.

From Agenda to Policy to Action

We, representatives from the Lutheran churches of all regions in the company of ecumenical sisters and brothers, have met to celebrate God in worship and study the Bible together as we search for new directions to experience equality and partnership with men within our churches. We are convinced that the gospel builds bridges. It affirms identity and the unity of all in Christ. It opens new avenues and renews challenges which urge us to do away with all barriers and differences of nationality, language, gender, culture, class or age. "For in Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, we are one in Christ." Bound together in Christ's love, all who gathered in Geneva for the LWF International Consultation on Women were for each other "... so great a cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1).

We have shared the realities of life in our churches and countries. We have shared our joy and presence in the Lutheran Communion, but we have also spoken out of our pain and frustration. We have shared our hopes and visions. Will our voices be heard? Will our concerns be taken into serious consideration? Will steps be taken by others to join us in our firm determination to struggle for equality with men in the church and in the LWF? Our struggle is within the church even as we know some have left the church because they see little hope of change.

We want to sit as equals at the tables organized within the churches and the LWF. We want to offer and to share. Fellowship, participation, solidarity and mu-

tual accountability are important to us. Women's participation in the LWF is a commitment as the Federation seeks to be a sign of an inclusive community. Equally important and even more challenging is allowing women's presence and thinking to impact church life. This goal of participation is still far from being realized and needs urgent attention. We need more women in the structures, but we also request that their methods and what they have to say be respected.

We affirm the office for Women in Church and Society (WICAS) and the many efforts undertaken by this office to enable the member churches to address fundamental issues. This office exists for the good of the whole church. Advocacy for the participation and empowerment of women has been the overriding task for this office. Over the years, WICAS has enabled women to meet together and to share stories of their own experiences, examine obstacles which hindered them from fully using their gifts in the church, and plan strategies for action. These gatherings have empowered women to speak for themselves. Women have been enabled to build international and ecumenical solidarity with other women. We call for the continuation of these events.

The widening focus on issues related to women as being critical concerns belonging to the whole church and the ever-expanding requests for assistance lifts up the need to re-examine the organizational status of WICAS. The demands on WICAS no longer come only from women in the Lutheran churches, but from many other sources. Churches and funding agencies require input from WICAS for their programmes. Women's organizations, ecumenical organizations, nongovernmental organizations and agencies related to the UN are places

where WICAS participation means the participation of Lutheran women and Lutheran churches. Enabling the Lutheran communion to move forward in accepting women's issues as issues of the whole church at this stage requires a visionary office with visionary personnel to assist various groups to shift and accommodate the new process. Within the LWF Secretariat, there is a need for WICAS to be related to the total work of the Federation and to have a close working relationship with all departments.

The urgent needs and requests directed to WICAS require vigorous ways of working with member churches, the liaison persons and regional coordinators. These ways include dialogue with churches on their plans of action and views on women, and the promotion of gender-sensitive research and maintenance of a data bank on women for the benefit of the whole communion. Expanded efforts are necessary to motivate more women to study, write and accept leadership roles. The working relationship with church leaders, regional coordinators and the newly established liaison persons need to be developed further.

Other requests include making more information available in the LWF official languages (i.e. English, French, German and Spanish) to women in member churches. Demands for **WOMEN** magazine are increasing and requests for similar publications in LWF official languages are also expressed. Expanded education and training experiences are continually requested. Strategies to broaden and deepen participation in the church and to deal with injustices suffered by women and children are identified as urgent. There is also a high demand for organized exchange programs in order to increase under-

standing and knowledge of each other within the Communion.

In order to respond to fundamental issues and to move forward, ways need to be found to strengthen the office for Women in Church and Society in the LWF. In the early years of LWF history, this office was designated as the "women's desk." Over a decade ago, it became known as the office for Women in Church and Society. However, the change in description did not change its structural relationship within the LWF. While called an office, this unit has not had the same status as other units defined as offices within the LWF structure. Because WICAS advocates for women in the context of issues affecting women and men and the whole communion, it is necessary for WICAS to have sufficient resources for programs and studies, a clear mandate for operation and visibility in all departments within the LWF Secretariat. Re-examination of the organizational status of WICAS is a necessary first step.

We look now to the LWF Assembly in 1997 and the twenty-first century. We hold in our memory lessons learned from the past as we address issues in the present. We look to the future because we are a people of faith and hope. WE ARE WITNESSES.

WE RECOMMEND

- Member churches
  - create a space for liaison persons to carry out their responsibilities and to allocate resources necessary for the implementation of their work.
  - continue to support and recognize the work of LWF-WICAS' network of regional coordinators.
  - who do not have a women's organization or structure for women create such a structure and provide funds for its functioning.
- LWF Secretariat
  - design a method to share all important decisions of the Federation with LWF-WICAS liaison persons and Regional Coordinators in order to ensure that women get the information.
  - continue to dialogue with the member churches to see that all member churches appoint a liaison person to WICAS and develop their own plan of action in accordance with commitments made at the LWF Eighth Assembly in 1990.
- LWF General Secretary find ways to strengthen the office for Women in Church and Society by ensuring resources and personnel that will enable WICAS to respond to critical issues, and by making certain that WICAS has direct access to decision-making processes in the LWF, so that the voices of women are included in all aspects of the LWF.

"Struggle is a Name for Hope"

Professor Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza,
Stendahl Professor of Divinity, Harvard University,
keynote speaker at the LWF International Consultation
on Women.

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